

6th Sunday Ordinary Time

It is a real shame that so many of us are afraid of dependence. Have you ever been told that to be dependent is to be weak? Have you said to your children: stand on your own two feet. Don't be so weak. Depend on yourself.

If we are to be successful in life and if we are to help our children grow into mature adults, we need to think more clearly than that. We need to express ourselves in a better way.

What we need to say is that being too dependent is an extreme we need to avoid. But so is to being too independent. One can be neurotically dependent. One can trust naively. But it is just as likely that one can trust too little as too much.

The fact is, from the biblical point of view, dependence is strength. Theologically, socially, personally, to depend – trust appropriately is to release great power for living.

In business and management we might call it delegation. In the family, it is trust. In athletics, it is team work. In learning, it is the acceptance of authority. In every area of life, dependence is in fact a necessary part of growth, meaning, and productivity. Yet, some people hold on to the shallow notion that to be dependent is to be powerless.

Have you ever seen the bumper sticker: If you eat, you are involved in agriculture? Have you read a poem called, “No Man is an Island?” Have you flown on an airplane, or driven through a crowded city? Have you had surgery or been entertained by television? How much better place our world is when we depend appropriately on each other.

The Scriptures for today hold high the biblical value of trust. They help us see that trust is a primary value for a fulfilled life. Let's hear Jeremiah speak of the power of dependence:

Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD,
whose hope is the LORD.

He is like a tree planted beside the waters
that stretches out its roots to the stream:
it fears not the heat when it comes;
its leaves stay green;
in the year of deficiency it shows no distress,
but still bears fruit.

I believe the Scripture is saying that when a person learns to practice dependence appropriately, he or she discovers a release of power for coping with life. When one is hesitant to trust, he or she cuts himself off from much of life's richness, meaning, power.

First, consider that appropriate dependence is an expression of courage, not weakness. Every human being comes into this world a totally dependent being.

Once we were born, we were largely dependent on others. Now, even if you are the strongest or the most mature person here, you are still greatly dependent on others for well – being. Does this mean you are weak? Of course not. We all have to depend on others whether we like it or not.

One theologian speaks about the courage of being human in terms of a dynamic polarity. On one end of polarity he sees the “courage to be apart from,” or the courage to be independent of others; on the other end is the “courage to be a part of,” the courage of togetherness. He asserts that a successful life is a dynamic blend of appropriate independence and appropriate dependence.

In the book “The Season of a Man's Life,” Dr. Levinson suggests that one of the keys to successfully navigating the midlife crisis is to take seriously both ends of a polarity which he defines as attachment – separateness. He calls for a release of power which only comes when one is willing to move to the unfamiliar side of

this polarity and learn to be more comfortable with that which has always seemed strange and forbidding. At times one needs the dependence of being attached; at others he or she needs the independence of being separate.

For many of us, such maturing would mean coming to terms with the courage of appropriate dependence. Dependence on God, dependence on your family members, dependence on your fellow workers, all have the potential of releasing real power for you.

But for some of us, it takes a super – human effort to risk trusting. “If I delegate, if I get more vulnerable, if I admit need, someone may think I am weak.” So, instead of releasing the power of trust, we drown ourselves in the powerlessness of doing it ourselves. We shut ourselves off from the warmth of human concern by refusing to admit, maybe even to ourselves, the deep needs all of us have. We end up overworked, tired, feeling sorry for ourselves, lonely; all because we refuse to implement the God given power of depending on others.

Next, observe that appropriate dependence bears the fruits of trust. Jeremiah puts it so very well. The fruits of depending on God bring fullness instead of emptiness. The trusting one is like a tree planted beside the waters, says Jeremiah. This says to me that trust in God brings both freedom and freshness to whoever is willing to acknowledge his or her dependence on God as Creator and Lord of life. The tree planted by the water is free to achieve its potential. It is free to draw from the God given resources which the Creator provided for those willing to be planted in him.

Whoever trusts only on the human level is compared to a shrub in the desert. Very little, no fruit, no freshness or real power, the shrub is dry and lonely, much like a person who hasn’t learned the power of trust.

Jeremiah also adds that the tree planted by the water “fears not the heat when it comes; in the year of deficiency it shows no distress.” This speaks to me of

confidence and security. It speaks of the power to know who I am, the power to operate from confidence even if the heat is on.

It speaks of the security that money in the bank simply cannot provide. To avoid dependence on god is to be, in Jeremiah's terms, "parched in the wilderness."

But, trust in God provides more than power and courage for achieving our creative potential and coping with life.

Appropriate dependence furnishes victory over human mortality. The reason human kind must depend is our limitations. We are mortal; only God is immortal. Any life, here or hereafter, in which we participate, is mirrored life. We get it because we are created in the image of God; and because we are redeemed by the grace of God.

Saint Paul is writing to the Corinthian church concerning disputes they have experienced. Some are disputing whether Christ rose from the death. Paul. Like Jeremiah and our Lord, points to God's fidelity as the source of human victory over immortality and death. He affirms that God has acted in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord to provide us a victory we have no other means of achieving.

Dependence is not weak. Dependence is necessary. Dependence does not tie us down; it frees us to realize our true potential. One of the problems that is now frustrating you to the point of distraction may just well be your unwillingness to trust. Why don't we give our courage to depend a chance to exercise itself? We could discover a power we have not been using. **Amen.**